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United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

Persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In its resolution 72/81, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General, after consulting the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, to report on progress made with regard to the implementation of the resolution, which relates to persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities.

The present report pertains to correspondence between the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations regarding action taken by the Government of Israel in implementing the relevant provisions of the resolution. It also presents information made available by the Commissioner-General to the Secretary-General on the return of refugees registered with the Agency to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip from Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic.

* A/73/150.

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1. The present report is submitted pursuant to resolution 72/81, by which the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General, after consulting with the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), to report on the progress made with regard to the implementation of the resolution.

2. On 4 May 2018, the Secretary-General addressed a note verbale to the Permanent Representatives of Member States, including the Permanent Representative of Israel, and to the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine, in which he drew attention to his reporting responsibility under resolutions 72/81 and 72/83 and requested them to inform him of any action that their Governments had taken or envisaged taking concerning the implementation of the relevant provisions of the resolutions.

3. In a note verbale dated 12 July, the Permanent Mission of Israel replied as follows:

> The Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations has the honour to refer to the note concerning resolutions 72/80 to 72/83 adopted by the General Assembly on 7 December 2017 under the agenda item entitled "United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East".
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> Israel decided, once again, to vote against these resolutions, owing to the political motivation that stands behind them and the fact that they represent a one-sided view that fails to reflect the reality on the ground.
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> The Permanent Mission would like to emphasize Israel's underlying position regarding UNRWA, as was envisaged by Prime Minister Netanyahu at the start of the Israeli Cabinet meeting held on 7 January 2018: "UNRWA is an organization that perpetuates the Palestinian refugee problem. It also perpetuates the narrative to the right of return, as it were, in order to eliminate the State of Israel; therefore, UNRWA needs to pass from the world. This is an agency that was established 70 years ago, only for the Palestinian refugees, at a time when the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) dealt with global refugee problems. Of course, this has created a situation in which there are great-grandchildren of refugees, who are not refugees but who are cared for by UNRWA, and another 70 years will pass and those great-grandchildren will have great-grandchildren, and, therefore, this absurdity needs to stop."
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> The Prime Minister also outlined the way forward: "UNRWA support funds need to be gradually shifted to UNHCR, with clear criteria for supporting genuine refugees, not fictitious refugees as is happening today under UNRWA. I have brought this position to the attention of the United States. This is how to rid the world of UNRWA and deal with genuine refugee problems, to the extent that such remain."
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> Prime Minister Netanyahu's remarks touch upon the fundamental issue of the UNRWA definition of refugees, which goes far beyond the accepted international definitions of and criteria for refugees. Rather than narrowing the problem in order to solve it, this flexible definition has widened it, with refugee status now applying to the fourth generation of Palestinians, dramatically increasing the number of registered refugees from an estimated 700,000 in 1949 (according to UNRWA) to more than 5,000,000.
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> By perpetuating the refugee status of Palestinians, instead of finding durable solutions to eliminate their status, UNRWA demonstrates that it is part of the problem and not part of the solution. Moreover, the perpetuation of their refugee status and the Palestinian "refugee" narrative amount to support of only one

solution — the return of 5 million Palestinians to Israeli territory, an objective that Israel rejects categorically because it undermines the prospects of reaching a peace agreement for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and threatens Israel's character as the world's only Jewish State.

Israel remains deeply concerned regarding the Agency's persistent and cynical use of humanitarian funding for the purpose of advocacy, which runs contrary to the efforts being made to achieve a political solution. It is unacceptable for a United Nations agency to actively support a biased narrative about the conflict in the region, while utilizing the refugee situation as the primary means of achieving this goal. UNRWA should stick to its original humanitarian mandate while refraining from one-sided politicized advocacy.

Another grave concern arose during the past year as UNRWA spokesperson, Gunness, admitted, once again, (in October 2017) that UNRWA had exposed a tunnel under one of its schools in Gaza. This was the second tunnel that UNRWA had discovered in the past couple of months. According to the announcement: "UNRWA robustly intervened with relevant parties to protest the violation of the sanctity and disrespect of the neutrality of United Nations premises. The presence of a tunnel underneath an UNRWA installation ... is unacceptable. It places children and Agency staff at risk. The Agency again demands full respect for the neutrality and inviolability of United Nations premises at all times."

The discovery of a second terror tunnel, operating directly under the classrooms of children, is not an isolated incident, but rather part of Hamas' systematic effort to exploit the organs of the United Nations. However, UNRWA deliberately chooses to omit any direct mention of Hamas' responsibility and of its common practice to misuse United Nations and civilian infrastructure. It is of utmost importance to ensure that all United Nations-affiliated agencies, and especially UNRWA, remain neutral and safeguarded from abuse by terrorist organizations.

Furthermore, in the past months, Israel has faced a series of provocative, premeditated mass confrontations along the security fence between the Gaza Strip and Israel. The Palestinian leadership insisted that these demonstrations were peaceful. However, the riots have centred on violence and placed innocent people, both Israeli and Palestinian, in grave danger. Hamas terrorists, hiding behind women and children being exploited as human shields, have burned tyres on the fence, thrown Molotov cocktails, planted explosive devices and even attempted to forcibly breach the fence and infiltrate Israeli territory. Twice, extremely violent Palestinian rioters penetrated the Palestinian side of the Kerem Shalom crossing, causing major damage to the fuel terminal and conveyor and thus harming the sole lifeline of the Gaza Strip. Not only that, but protesters keep sending flaming kites over the fence on a daily basis, spreading forest fires across Israel's southern agricultural lands, threatening human lives, causing severe environmental damage and creating a heavy economic toll.

Despite the reality on the ground, we have seen time and time again the public statements and tweets of UNRWA exempting Hamas of its responsibility and lacking condemnation of the main role of Hamas in those events. Moreover, UNRWA policies only encourage Hamas to keep using civilians, including UNRWA students, for the sole purpose of inciting violence and thus distracting the world from Hamas' decade-long control of the Gaza Strip and its detrimental impact on the deteriorating humanitarian crisis in the area. As we have seen in the past months, especially regarding the riots on the Gaza border, the public statements of UNWRA clearly indicate its growing leniency towards advocacy in the service of Hamas, rather than focusing on relief and humanitarian

assistance in the best interest of the Palestinian people in Gaza. By doing so, UNRWA only exacerbates the unnecessary human suffering of innocent Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

Despite the acute security threats, Israel is actively working to support reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip. Since October 2014, the United Nations-backed Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism has enabled the entrance of over 10.33 million tons of various types of construction materials into the Gaza Strip, 3.28 million tons during 2017 alone. As of December 2017, 127,187 out of a total of 130,000 damaged housing units were renovated. More than 19,262 new housing units are in advanced stages of construction, while hundreds are ready for occupancy. Hundreds of public projects, including schools, clinics, mosques and parks, have been completed or are near completion. Delays in reconstruction stem predominantly from the actions of Hamas and its conflict with the Palestinian Authority, including the Palestinian Authority's decision to keep suspending payments for salaries in Gaza, and a lack of international funding for the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism. It is important to note that Israel is committed to enabling the delivery of humanitarian assistance and continues to provide electrical power and water, as well as enable the entry of goods, for the people of Gaza.

In conclusion, Israel would like to re-emphasize Prime Minister Netanyahu's stance regarding UNRWA, which calls for a gradual shifting of UNRWA support funds to UNHCR, while defining clear criteria as to who is a "genuine refugee" and who is a "fictitious refugee". However, until this vision is put into practice, UNRWA and its workers must keep high standards of impartiality, as expected from all United Nations employees. UNRWA must return to its original mandate as a relief and humanitarian agency, instead of distorting facts and presenting them in one-sided reports and statements that only heighten tensions between the parties.

4. In connection with paragraph 5 of resolution 72/81, the Secretary-General has obtained from the Commissioner-General of UNRWA the information available to him on the return of refugees registered with the Agency to the occupied Palestinian territory. As indicated in previous reports on the subject, UNRWA is not involved in any arrangements for the return of refugees, nor is it involved in any arrangements for the return of displaced persons who are not registered as refugees. Its information is based on requests by registered refugees for the transfer of their UNRWA registration records from Jordan, Lebanon or the Syrian Arab Republic to the occupied Palestinian territory. The Agency would not necessarily be aware of the return of any registered refugees to the occupied Palestinian territory who did not request the transfer of their registration records. So far as is known to the Agency, from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018, 230 refugees registered with UNRWA returned to the West Bank and 218 to the Gaza Strip from places outside the occupied Palestinian territory. It should be noted that some of those may not have been displaced in 1967, but may have been displaced in earlier or later years or may be members of the family of a displaced registered refugee. Thus, taking into account the estimate given in paragraph 4 of the previous report (A/72/313), the number of displaced registered refugees who are known by the Agency to have returned to the occupied Palestinian territory since June 1967 is 37,541. UNRWA is unable to estimate the total number of displaced inhabitants who have returned. It keeps records only of registered refugees and other registered persons[1] and, as noted above, even those records, in particular

[1] "Other registered persons" refers to those who, at the time of original registration, did not satisfy all the Agency's criteria for "Palestine refugee", but who were determined to have suffered significant loss and/or hardship for reasons relating to the 1948 conflict in Palestine; it also includes persons who belong to the families of other registered persons.

with regard to the location of registered refugees and other registered persons, may be incomplete.

5. In connection with paragraph 3 of resolution 72/81, the Secretary-General refers to the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA for the period from 1 January to 31 December 2017 (A/73/13) and to the previous reports of the Commissioner-General for accounts of the ongoing assistance provided by UNRWA to persons displaced and in need of continued assistance.